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ABSTRACT

A program of instruction was designed to promote positive self-concept in elementary school students in order to test the hypothesis that such self-concept is necessary for academic achievement and desirable behavior. Twenty students who were performing at a year below grade level in reading and math were selected for the study. These students received individual tutoring twice a week for 14 weeks from parent volunteers. Self-concept, achievement, and the behavior of the students were measured before and after the tutoring program. The measurement instruments used were Rotter's Test of Self-Concept, the Wide Range Achievement Test for Reading and Math, and questionnaires administered to teachers. While the results showed increases in achievement and desirable behavior, weaknesses in the design prevent the determination of a clear relationship between these results and positive self-concept. It is suggested that the study be replicated using a control group and other design modifications. (Author)

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NATIONAL ED.D. PROGRAM FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERS

IMPROVING SELF-CONCEPT:

A POSSIBLE AID TO INCREASED ACHIEVEMENT

AND MORE DESIRABLE BEHAVIOR

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Abstract

The purpose of this practicum was to develop a program of instruction to modify negative self-concept, with the possibility that modification might increase achievement and desirable behavior at school. The program developed at Coral Springs Elementary School was one to one tutoring by parent-volunteers, with self-concept, achievement, and behavior measured at the beginning and end of the program. Results showed increases in achievement and desirable behavior but were not clearly connected to self-concept because of design weaknesses. The study might be replicated in other schools with low achievers, and with design modification would clarify the relationship of positive self-concept to increased achievement and better behavior.

INTRODUCTION

In our school most classrooms have one or more pupils who are low in achievement, who do not seem successful and who often exhibit behavior patterns which seem undesirable to teachers. These behavior patterns tend to be at opposite poles, either overly aggressive or overly withdrawn. The majority of students who fall into this pattern are from a small area of low socio-economic backgrounds from which our school draws.

This study is based on the idea developed by others that positive self-concept is necessary for academic achievement and desirable behavior. A program was designed to promote positive self-concept in students and attempts were made to measure self-concept, achievement, and behavior near the beginning and end of the program to see if there was any increase in positive self-concept, and if there was any accompanying increase in achievement and more desirable behavior.

IS SELF-CONCEPT THE CULPRIT?

In searching for a cause for low achievement combined with aggressive or withdrawn behavior, one is struck by the constantly recurring theme that self-concept can have much to do with both achievement and behavior.

Alice Miel says "the concept of self is so basic to all education that the 1962 yearbook of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development was devoted solely to this aspect of the curriculum".[1]

Arthur Combs seems to agree when he says "We are... discovering that a child's success in school depends... upon the kind of self concepts he has about himself".[2]

Studies by Lecky, Palding, Bruner, and McClelland, described in an article by Walter Waetjen[3], all have shown achievement to some degree dependent on how children viewed themselves and their abilities.

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[1]Alice Miel, "Let Us Develop Children Who Care About Themselves and Others", Audiovisual Instruction, VII, No. 6, June, 1962, 355-357.

[2]Arthur W. Combs, An address presented at the ASCD annual conference, Seattle, Washington, 1958.

[3]Walter B. Waetjen, "Facts About Learning", Baltimore Bulletin of Education, XXXVIII, No. 2, December, 1960, 22-28..

Others connect self-concept with behavior. For example: Goodwin Watson says that "The pupil who sees himself at his worst in school...is likely to feel resentment at schools, teachers, and books and may turn their anger outward against respectable society or inward toward themselves".[4]

Also Allen Ornstein and Stanley Rosenfeld say that the poor self-image of the disadvantaged child leaves him dispirited and rejected, so that he rejects schools and has no background in handling judgements about right or wrong.[5]

The literature seems to suggest a reasonable amount of support for assuming that negative self-concept must be dealt with in trying to change achievement and behavior. On the basis of this assumption it was decided to design a program aimed at low achievers geared specifically to changing self-concept, and attempt to measure any change in self-concept, achievement, and behavior.

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[4]Goodwin Watson, "What Do We Know About Learning?", NEA Journal, LII, No. 3, March, 1963, 20-22.

[5]Allen C. Ornstein and Stanley S. Rosenfeld, "Environmental and Other Factors Which Mitigate Against Disadvantaged Youngsters in School", Contemporary Education, XXXXIx, No. 4, January, 1968, 156-160.

THE PROGRAM

In order to identify low achievers teachers were asked to submit names of students who were performing below grade level in Reading or Math by at least one year. From the names submitted by the teachers, twenty children were selected by taking every third child in alphabetical order until the total of twenty was reached.

It was planned to set up a program of regular tutoring by parent volunteers on a one to one basis outside the classroom. A call was made for parent volunteers from which we received sixteen responses. An informal meeting was held on November 20, 1972 in which the concept was explained, and of the original sixteen, eleven committed themselves to the program and attended a workshop on November 22, 1972. The following points were stressed:

1. Possible relationships of self-concept to achievement and behavior
2. Establishing a good relationship and working to improve self-concept as the key role of tutors
3. Each session of one half hour to consist of an academic task plus an activity to improve self-concept

Times were set for each tutor to work with a child two times per week and they were assigned children with

whom to work. Nine tutors were assigned two children and two volunteers were assigned one each.

During the week of November 27th the program began. Tutors reported to the principal who took them to the child's room and introduced the tutor to the teacher and the child. The tutors were presented with an academic task and helped in finding a place in which to hold their sessions that was agreeable to them and to the child. Some decided to use the library, and some used outside tables in the mall.

During the course of the fourteen week program, tutors met with the principal individually once every two weeks for assignment of academic tasks and self-concept activities. In addition the tutors met as a group to share ideas once each month -- on December 8, January 26, February 16, and March 16. During these group meetings the tutors discussed progress both in their academic program and in their relationship with their students.

Of the eleven parents originally involved in the program, ten fulfilled their committment and one dropped out near the beginning of the program. The person who dropped out had been tutoring only one child and that

child was assigned to the other tutor who had previously worked with only one.

Of the twenty children who began the program, two moved away and eighteen completed the full fourteen weeks. Test results for those two children have been omitted entirely.

THE MEASUREMENT - SELF-CONCEPT

Self-concept was measured in two different ways: as the tutors and teachers viewed the students' self-concept in the first and fourteenth weeks of the program, and as the students viewed themselves as revealed by a test of self-concept.

The views of the tutors and teachers were gathered with a questionnaire (see Appendix A) of items that could be considered connected with positive self-concept. Items rated "Always" or "Frequently" on the questionnaire were considered positive, and items rated "Seldom" or "Never" were considered negative.

Numbers of positive and negative responses by tutors were totaled, simply to note gain or decrease in positive items from the first week to the fourteenth week. The same procedure was used for teacher responses. Comparative results are shown below in Table 1.

TABLE 1.

Self-Concept as Viewed by Tutors and Teachers

	1st Week		14th Week	
	No. Pos.	No. Neg.	No. Pos.	No. Neg.
Tutors	81 (64%)	44 (36%)	100 (80%)	25 (20%)
Teachers	46 (27%)	123 (73%)	88 (51%)	83 (49%)

The test of self-concept given the students themselves consisted of Rotter's Test of Self Concept. Answering less than 45 percent of the questions positively was considered "negative" while answering more than 50 percent in a positive manner was considered "positive". Aid in administering and judging answers was given by the guidance counselor and the school psychologist.

The test was given near the beginning of the progrem and again after completion of the progrem. Comparative results are shown below in Table 2.

TABLE 2.

Self-Concept of Students as Shown by the Rotter Test

		% Pos. Resp. 1st Week	% Pos. Resp. 14th Week	% Gain or Loss
1.	Alvin B.	83% +	100% +	+13
2.	Herbert B.	46% -	69% +	+23
3.	Ralph B.	0% -	15% -	+15
4.	Lisa C.	45% -	60% +	+15
5.	Frank C.	60% +	80% +	+20
6.	John E.	40% -	23% -	-17
7.	Richard E.	24% -	83% +	+59
8.	Patrick G.	0% -	31% -	+31
9.	Willie J.	87% +	93% +	+ 6
10.	Craig M.	9% -	20% -	+11
11.	Paula O.	50% Avg.	55% +	+ 5
12.	Alicia P.	66% +	71% +	+ 5
13.	Stanley R.	76% +	80% +	+ 4
14.	Tammy S.	38% -	46% -	+ 8
15.	Lucinda S.	30% -	15% -	-15
16.	Derwin T.	76% +	69% +	- 7
17.	David T.	15% -	46% -	+31
18.	Ronald Z.	71% +	77% +	+ 6

Week 1: Positive - 7; Negative - 10; Average - 1
Week 14: Positive - 11; Negative - 7

As can be seen in Table 1, positive responses from both tutors and teachers increased in the fourteenth week, indicating that from their view the students' self-concepts were more positive.

The summary in Table 2 shows that only four students moved from a negative self-concept to a positive self-concept by the end of fourteen weeks. In spite of this, sixteen of the eighteen students had shown gains in the percentage of questions answered positively, which indicates gain in self-concept even if still rated "negative".

THE MEASUREMENT - ACHIEVEMENT

Near the beginning and end of the study the students were given the Wide Range Achievement Test for Reading and Math. Two non-readers were given the Harper Row Readiness Test. All scores were converted to years and months. Table 3 shows the gain or loss from the first to fourteenth weeks.

TABLE 3.

Achievement of Students

		Gain or Loss	
		Reading	Math
1.	Alvin B.	+ .1	+ .8
2.	Herbert B.	+ .6	+ .8
3.	Ralph B.	+ .3	+ .4
4.	Lisa C.	+ .6	+ .5
5.	Frank C.	+ .4	+ .3
6.	John E.	+1.0	+ .3
7.	Richard E.	+ .7	+ .6
8.	Patrick G.	.0	+ .5
9.	Willie J.	+ .1	+ .6
10.	Craig M.	+1.0	+ .5
11.	Paula O.	+ .2	+ .7
12.	Alicia P.	+ .3	+ .4
13.	Stanley R.	+ .8	+ .4
14.	Tammy S.	.0	+ .2
15.	Lucinda S.	+ .3	+ .2
16.	Derwin T.	+ .3	+1.2
17.	David T.	+ .4	+ .7
18.	Ronald Z.	+ .7	+ .6
	Average gain:	.4	.5

In Reading fifteen students showed gains, while two showed no progress and one regressed. In Math all eighteen students showed gains. As a total group, gains were shown in both Reading and Math.

THE MEASUREMENT - BEHAVIOR

Behavior was measured by the last part of the questionnaire given the teachers at the beginning and end of the study. From the teachers' descriptions, behavior was labeled "aggressive", "withdrawn", or "normal". The first two labels were considered desirable behavior, the last acceptable. It is recognized that these descriptions were subjective, but it is assumed that tabulating the labels can measure change, at least as viewed by the teacher. Comparative results are shown in Table 3 below.

TABLE 3.

Student Behavior as Viewed by Teachers

		1st Week	14th Week
1.	Alvin B.	aggressive	less aggressive
2.	Herbert B.	normal	moderately aggressive
3.	Ralph B.	normal	no change
4.	Lisa C.		
5.	Frank C.	aggressive	no change
6.	John E.	aggressive	no change
7.	Richard E.		
8.	Patrick C.	withdrawn	more outgoing
9.	Willie J.	aggressive	less aggressive
10.	Craig M.	withdrawn	no change
11.	Paula O.	normal	no change
12.	Alicia P.	aggressive	less aggressive
13.	Stanley R.	withdrawn	more outgoing
14.	Tammy S.	withdrawn	more outgoing
15.	Lucinda S.	withdrawn	moderately aggressive
16.	Derwin T.	withdrawn	more outgoing
17.	David T.	aggressive	less aggressive
18.	Ronald Z.	aggressive	less aggressive

Withdrawn - 6 Changed to: 4 outgoing; 1 aggressive; 1 no change
Aggressive - 7 Changed to: 5 less aggressive; 2 no change
Normal - 3 Changed to: 1 aggressive; 2 no change

THE ANALYSIS

Self-Concept - Of the eighteen students tested in self-concept, seven were high or positive, one was average, and nine were low or negative. After the program was carried out, eleven were high, and seven were low. It is interesting to note that all but three gave a higher percentage of positive answers on the second test so that it may be concluded that fifteen out of eighteen made some progress in viewing themselves more positively during the period of the study.

Both parent-tutors and teachers saw students as exhibiting more positive type actions near the end of the study than at the baginning.

An unrelated fact is that parents viewed the students as exhibiting greater numbers of positive traits both at the beginning and end of the study than teachers did, though both noted increases.

No attempt was made to compare individual self-concept with teacher-tutor views of that individual's self-concept.

Achievement - Of the eighteen students, fifteen showed gains in Reading while two showed no gains and one decreased. An average gain was four months for the total group.

All eighteen students showed gains in Math for the period studied, with an average gain of five months for the total group.

In correlating self-concept with achievement, those who rated "positive" in self-concept had an average gain of four months in Reading as compared to three months for those who rated "negative." The "positive" group had an average gain of six months in Math as compared to four months for the "negative" group.

Behavior - Of the students who showed gains in self-concept, six had been labeled "aggressive"; five of those had been viewed as less aggressive and one was unchanged near the end of the study. The seventh child who was seen as "aggressive" had a decrease in self-concept and was viewed as unchanged at the end of the study.

Of the students who showed gains in self-concept, four had been labeled "withdrawn"; three of those were seen as more outgoing near the end of the study. The fourth was seen as unchanged. Two students who were seen as "withdrawn" had decreases in self-concept, and of those one was seen as moderately aggressive near the end of the study and one was seen as more outgoing.

The preceding two paragraphs seem to show a high correlation between gains in self-concept and changes in undesirable behavior. As stated previously, "aggressive" and "withdrawn" are assumed to be undesirable, so changes to "less aggressive" and "more outgoing" are desirable. On this basis nine (56 per cent) had changed for the better, two (12 per cent) had changed for the worse, and five (31 per cent) had not changed.

CONCLUSIONS

From the analysis it may be concluded that self-concept can be changed toward a more positive basis. It may not be concluded that the tutoring was solely responsible for the changes because of relatively few contact hours when compared to classroom contact hours. It might be reasonable to speculate that the idea of being involved in the study might have some built-in positive reinforcement for teacher and tutor treatment of the children. This could have been proven or disproven by use of a control group.

It may also be concluded that decreased undesirable behavior accompanies an increase in positive self-concept. A weakness in interpreting this part of the study exists because there was a lack of suitable instruments for measuring behavior objectively.

Though there were overall gains in achievement which accompanied gains in self-concept, it may not be reasonable to attribute those achievement gains to increased self-concept. It is possible the achievement gains may instead simply be attributed to the regular classroom instruction. Here again, use of a control group would have proven or disproven this point.

Further research might be done along the same lines with focus on correcting the weaknesses mentioned. It may be that the conclusions should not be considered definite until then.

One interesting result of the study is that the parent-tutors have become so involved with their students that they have no desire to cease their relationship; all of them plan to continue their sessions to the end of the school year. The project may be considered successful if for no other reason than this: it has increased parental involvement in our school.

Child's Name _____

Tutor's Name _____

PARENT-TEACHER RESPONSE

	Always	Frequently	Seldom	Never
1. Does he seem to have confidence?				
2. Does he take part in conversations?				
3. Does he smile?				
4. Does he talk about himself?				
5. Does he listen?				
6. Does he touch you?				
7. Does he let you touch him?				
8. Does he try to do the task set for him?				
9. Does he have an aptitude for the following?				
a. Learning tasks?				
b. Physical tasks?				
10. Is he alert?				
11. Does he respond quickly to questions?				
12. Is he able to use logic?				

Additional comment concerning your impression of this child:

_____

_____

_____

What are some activities you are using with this child academically; what are some activities you are using to establish a relationship on a personal basis?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____